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THE CURE-ALL OF UNIVERSAL MILITARY SERVICE ¹

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IN the years to come, none of the many amazing phenomena of 1916 will, I am sure, cause greater wonderment than our recent discovery that universal military service is the cure-all for every one of our American ills. Do we wish to defend our country? We have but to adopt the system of training every boy to be a soldier, and the problem is solved. Do we wish to become industrially efficient? Then let us forget all about vocational training, but give every American a year under arms, and presto! we shall outdo Germany in scientific efficiency and management. Is our youth lawless and undisciplined? Universal compulsory service will end that once for all. Is our democracy halting? It is the tonic of a democratic army that we need in which all men shall pay for the privileges of citizenship by a year of preparation for poison gas and of learning how to murder other human beings. Our melting-pot is a failure? Then let us pour into it the iron of militarism, and it will fuse every element at once. Finally, if we need an American soul—and the war has suddenly taught us that this glorious country lacks a soul—it is the remedy of universal military service that is to supply our spiritual needs and give us the ability to feel as one, to think as one, so steer towards our destiny as of one mind, imperialistically.

It is so alluring and so entrancingly easy, the wonder is that we have never thought of it before. We saw it going on in France and Germany and Russia, but it seemed altogether repulsive in its forms. Americans to be conscripted? Heaven forbid. There rose before us the unutterable cruelties of non-

¹ An address delivered at the meeting of the Academy of Political Science on May 18, 1916.

commissioned officers and some of the officers—visions of the thousands of men coming to our shores with hands mutilated to avoid the barracks with their open immoralities, their bitter hardships, the loss of three years of so many working lives. The “Red Rosa,” Rosa Luxembourg, with her 10,000 authenticated instances of cruelties to German soldiers, inflicted by their own countrymen behind the screen of official authority, explained to us why so many young Germans emigrated before becoming of military age. In speaking of the case of one soldier horribly abused at Metz, the “Red Rosa” declared: “It is certainly one of those dramas which are enacted day in and day out in German barracks, although the groans of the actors never reach our ears.” At once the German army sought to prosecute her when it was announced that she would call 1,030 eye-witnesses to grievous abuses of military authority in Germany’s “democratic” army.

In Germany, of course, universal service is not in the least democratic, save that all must serve. Upon that we can surely all agree. The autocracy rules the army, and the aristocracy is fortified by it. More than one debate in the Reichstag has been enlivened by the bitter attacks by bourgeois orators against the favoritism shown to the Imperial Guards and to other fashionable regiments. There is even a caste within a caste, for men who pass through the gymnasia need serve but one year. Those whose fathers are too poor to educate them thus must give two years of their lives to carrying arms. The spirit of arrogance and aristocracy which the military life, with its dueling, its mediæval code of honor, fosters, is about as anti-democratic as anything in the world. When men, merely by reason of the coat they wear, deem themselves sacrosanct and especially privileged, even to the extent of running through civilians by whom they fancy themselves insulted, or by preparing to turn their machine-guns upon their civilian fellow-townsmen, as in Zabern, it is obviously absurd to contend that the system of which they are the products smacks, save in the remotest, of anything democratic.

And never, save in Russia, was there a better illustration of the truth of our own James Madison’s saying that “large armies

and heavy taxes are the best-known instruments for bringing the many under the dominion of the few." General von Falkenhayn, the present Chief of Staff and War Minister, was not altogether far from the truth when he said that but for the army "not a stone of the Reichstag building would remain in place," provided we assume that he meant to typify by the Reichstag building the present form of government in Berlin. No one need look further than the Russian system of universal service for a complete reason for the failure of the Russian revolution that all enlightened men wished well. The truth is that men of noble spirit are in every land crushed by the whole system of compulsory military labor precisely as compulsory servitude deadens men's souls everywhere.

And those Americans who see in the French army a perfect model for ourselves would do well to forget neither the shocking revelations of graft which have come to light before and since the war, nor the depths of infamy sounded by the military in the Dreyfus case, nor the fact that General Boulanger came within an ace of upsetting the Republic he had taken oath to preserve. But, we are told, Australia is democratic, quite like ourselves, and Australia has dedicated its youth to a training in arms with much resultant good in the present campaign. Why should we not be like Australia? Surely, there is no militarism there. And look at Switzerland! Does it not point the way? Well, so far as the latter is concerned, it does not. There is no comparison whatever between a little homogeneous country of about four millions—homogeneous despite the use of three languages—with a small and extremely mountainous country to defend, and our own vast continent.

But in one respect, the Swiss system does set an admirable example to the United States: It allows no general to exist save after the declaration of war. Its highest officer is a colonel. No major-generals parade the country urging "preparedness"; no brigadiers bewail the terrible fate that will overtake Switzerland if her standing force is not doubled at once. Yet even in Switzerland, if report be true, there is an anti-army party, people who complain that their military business has become ominous ever since so many of the younger officers have been serving in

the German army and become imbued with the spirit of the Prussian General Staff, just as, according to a prominent Australian, speaking in a public meeting in London a few months ago, the feeling against the conscription of boys was so intense in Australia that the law compelling this servitude would have been repealed had not the war come just when it did. Perhaps the fact that in fifteen years some 22,000 Australian boys have been punished for refusal to perform military service, or for minor infractions of discipline, a large proportion by jail sentences, may have had something to do with the growing feeling against it. As to its merits, there is the same difference of military opinion in regard to its work, as is to be found in regard to the value of our own military forces.

But let us grant for the sake of argument that there is solid worth in the Australian and Swiss systems and less militaristic danger than under any other. Would the same hold true with us? Australia is but a colony, unable to make war by itself, controlled and protected by the power of the mother country's fleet. Switzerland, by her geographical and ethnic situation and the scarcity of her numbers, cannot dream of wars of conquest. She is not a world power. She has no colonies, or oversea entanglements, or foreign alliances. How different is our situation! We have powerful military cliques, great aggregations of capital seeking outlet abroad and engineered by the same groups of privileged citizens who have been behind the Six-Power Chinese loan, who desire to exploit the Philippines for our own benefit, who have set up in Nicaragua a government upheld to-day only by American bayonets, who desire commercially to conquer the remainder of the hemisphere. We have seen outbursts of jingo passion in 1849 and 1898 marked by the stealing of other people's lands. The universal arming of the nation—what would it not mean in another such period of excitement under the rule of conscienceless and time-serving legislators, or administrators, or by generals gone into politics, with eyes keen only for a nation's aggrandizement and viewing every question from the standpoint of a soldier!

History shows us clearly what it all might mean. Leaving aside the fate of the ancient republics, should we not recall

what happened to the new-born French Republic? The nation rushed to arms, and out of the hurly-burly emerged the imperial figure which became the scourge of Europe. Such was the sudden transformation of a nation that but a few years before was imbued with the spirit of liberty, fraternity, and equality, whose doctrine did permeate all Europe to its very lasting betterment. But this tide of good-will, this spirit of universal brotherhood, was conquered by the militaristic spirit and militarism until it became, not the great leavening, leveling influence it should have become, but a menace for all the world against which all the nations of Europe were compelled to unite. Now we Americans, of course, think that nothing of the kind can happen to us—that we merely seek peace and to defend our own. Is it utterly without significance that our most distinguished Rear-Admiral goes up and down the country preaching that the American flag shall be carried at once to Cape Horn; that every republic to the south of us shall be conquered? Does it mean nothing that the Navy League demands that we shall take what they call “our rightful share of over-sea trade” and seize upon land which has not already been preëmpted by other strong nations for colonies for the United States? Is it not true that we are already extending our government over the Caribbean by force of bayonets?

We have one hundred millions of people; we have neighbors on our borders whom we could easily crush if we chose. To the south of us a score of republics fear every military move we make. It is an historic fact that even before the war in Europe the menace of our rapidly growing fleet was urged in the Reichstag, in the British and Japanese Parliaments, as the reason for further increase of their naval armaments. Any introduction of universal military servitude in the Western world would send a chill over the entire American continent and be viewed with alarm by the rest of the world.

Assuming that we are going to think of nobody else, and to blind our eyes to the obvious effects abroad of our arming—what does universal service mean? If it is to be for one year, fully seven hundred thousand young men will be annually withdrawn from productive labor; if it is to be for two years, and on

the German model, our standing army would be at least a million four hundred thousand, or nearly double that of Germany, in 1914. It would mean so vast a machinery of control and discipline that no other department could compare with it in expense or in the multitude of its permanent employees. Has any one in America who is advocating universal service yet computed the cost, direct or indirect, to the nation? If so, I have not seen it. Even on the dilettante Swiss and Australian basis, it would be stupendous. If carried out under federal supervision, it would enormously increase our most favored class of citizens—our military and naval servants—and their pension rolls. Abroad the conscripts receive only a few cents a day for their service, which is practically unpaid (in Turkey, even in war time, the soldier gets but twenty-five cents a month). Would our American youth stand for this when our National Guard has just now, by skilful political influence, succeeded in getting itself on the federal pay-roll—the first time that men have been so paid, yet remained important political factors in civil life? But we need have less concern with the financial cost and the creation of a dangerous military caste and the terrible burden of taxation than with the indirect results.

For what those do not see who know that universal service is what we need make patriots by the million is that the spirit of universal servitude, whether Australian, German, or Swiss, makes directly against the American ideal, for it inculcates blind obedience to the will of others, subordination to those who are masters, not necessarily because of superior wisdom or fitness, but largely because of accident. Heretofore we have always valued the American's self-assertiveness—yes, his refusal to recognize masters, his independence of thought and action, his mental alertness, particularly the happy-go-lucky Yankee initiative and individuality, as some of his best characteristics. We hated the servile obedience of the foreigner. Indeed, our whole American experiment was founded as a protest against certain tendencies abroad akin to those we are now asked to make dominant by means of universal service. The manhood of our western pioneers, the daring spirit of those who conquered the wildernesses were our admiration. They might verge on the

lawless at times, but militarism gave them nothing and could add nothing to their virile courage and their ability to take care of themselves. Now we are to prefer all men cast in one mould, drilled into one way of thinking, and taught blind obedience to those set above them. Formerly, we deemed it most worth while that all men should have their own opinions, express them freely, and if their consciences dictated, differ with those rulers if they saw fit. The principle of voluntary military service is directly connected with the principle of freedom of conscience which led to the foundation of Massachusetts and of Pennsylvania. Universal conscription, however disguised, by whatever foreign name it is characterized, makes against freedom of conscience and drives into intellectual slavery men whose souls revolt at the whole accursed system of teaching men to prepare to kill others.

Take the education of our boys. Recently, at a joint meeting of two schoolmasters' associations, there were divided views on some issues, but none apparently as to the utter lawlessness of our American youth and the complete failure of our private schools to reduce them to subordination by means of mental and moral discipline. And so there were many who grasped with joy at the universal military-drill idea to retrieve for them the ground lost by their own failure to do the fundamental thing they pledged themselves to accomplish. Of course, they knew little or nothing about universal service; perhaps it was the unexplored mystery of it that appealed. Many Americans are quite sure that the latest untried remedy, be it some law, or the initiative and referendum, or the recall of judicial decisions, or some other panacea, is, by reason of its very newness, just the medicine for a given ill they have been looking for. So with these school-teachers. Ignoring the fact that our private military schools have been anything but popular, and only in exceptional cases of high standing, they turn to military drill as to a last straw. But some of them do not even stop there; they want everybody subjected to military service. They forget that to some of their boys enforced military training may be as poison, and do not inquire whether they are not suddenly exalting the physical above the intellectual. The only thing that

stands out about it is that they, too, confessing themselves and their judgment failures heretofore, are now ready to take a leap into the dark.

Advocates of military preparedness are fond of likening their policies to the insurance policy upon our edifices. But there is a point beyond which no man would increase his premiums upon any given premises; he would tear them down to get a lower rate on a more modern structure, or he would build a concrete structure and do away with insurance altogether. So the price of universal military servitude is far too great a price to pay for insuring peace by any free peoples. Its dangers, its contaminating effects, the terrible weapon it forges for rulers, its reducing men to a dead level, far offset the alleged advantages which are physical betterment, greater practical efficiency and energy, and a sense of responsibility to the nation. For all of these things the price of compulsory service is too heavy. For it does not train the unfit or build up the weak, and it is not meant or intended to increase efficiency in civil life. Its primary purpose is to turn out killers, not workers. It often destroys those it would benefit—no less than ten thousand three hundred German conscripts have committed suicide in the last thirty years, or at the rate of one a day. There was a time when the price of social order was that human beings should go armed all the time, when they lived and ate and slept with their weapons by their sides. Humanity was deemed to have advanced itself from this stage until the present time has seen a return to it in the conscript armies of Europe. Surely, if the price of each man's carrying arms against another was too great to pay, the social cost of arming every man in a nation against all the men of other nations is wholly beyond reason in the present age. The answer to the world's difficulties is not the old destructive reactionary policy of arming to the teeth, but of so building our national edifices and so relating them one to the other that we can at once by mutual organization of nations reduce the premiums to a minimum or wipe them out altogether by building a concrete fireproof structure of internationalism—equipped with such lightning rods as world courts and international parliaments, and, if needs must be, an international police force of volunteers.

What today—what single thing—would most quickly win for Germany anew the confidence of the world and make possible the immediate coming of peace abroad? What else but an announcement by Germany that hereafter she would forever abandon universal military service? The chief menace of her militarism, against which all the world is roused, would disappear over-night.

No, to lead the world aright, the United States ought not to be debating to-day whether it prefers the voluntary military system or universal conscription, but how rapidly it can induce the other nations by precept, by example, by enlightened leadership, to limit all armaments to the dimensions of police forces. Fortunately, the European struggle bids fair to prove the futility of war as it has never been proved before. Fortunately, there is evidence in every land that the world is to be a different place when the soldiers return from the trenches. The reaction when it comes will have its echoes here, and will, it is to be hoped, find men marveling how any Americans could possibly have espoused that which is the chief prop of kings, czars and kaisers and their militarists, and have even for a moment turned their backs upon the voluntary system which breeds enthusiastic followers of the flag, where conscription produces deserters, bounty-jumpers and mock-patriots.